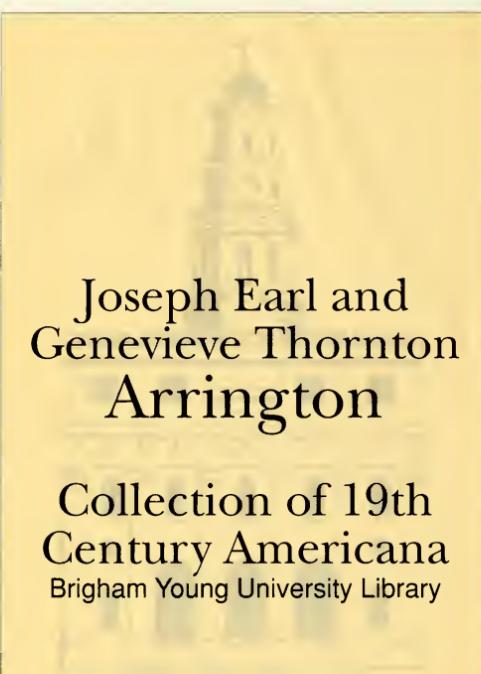


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James McNeill Whistler

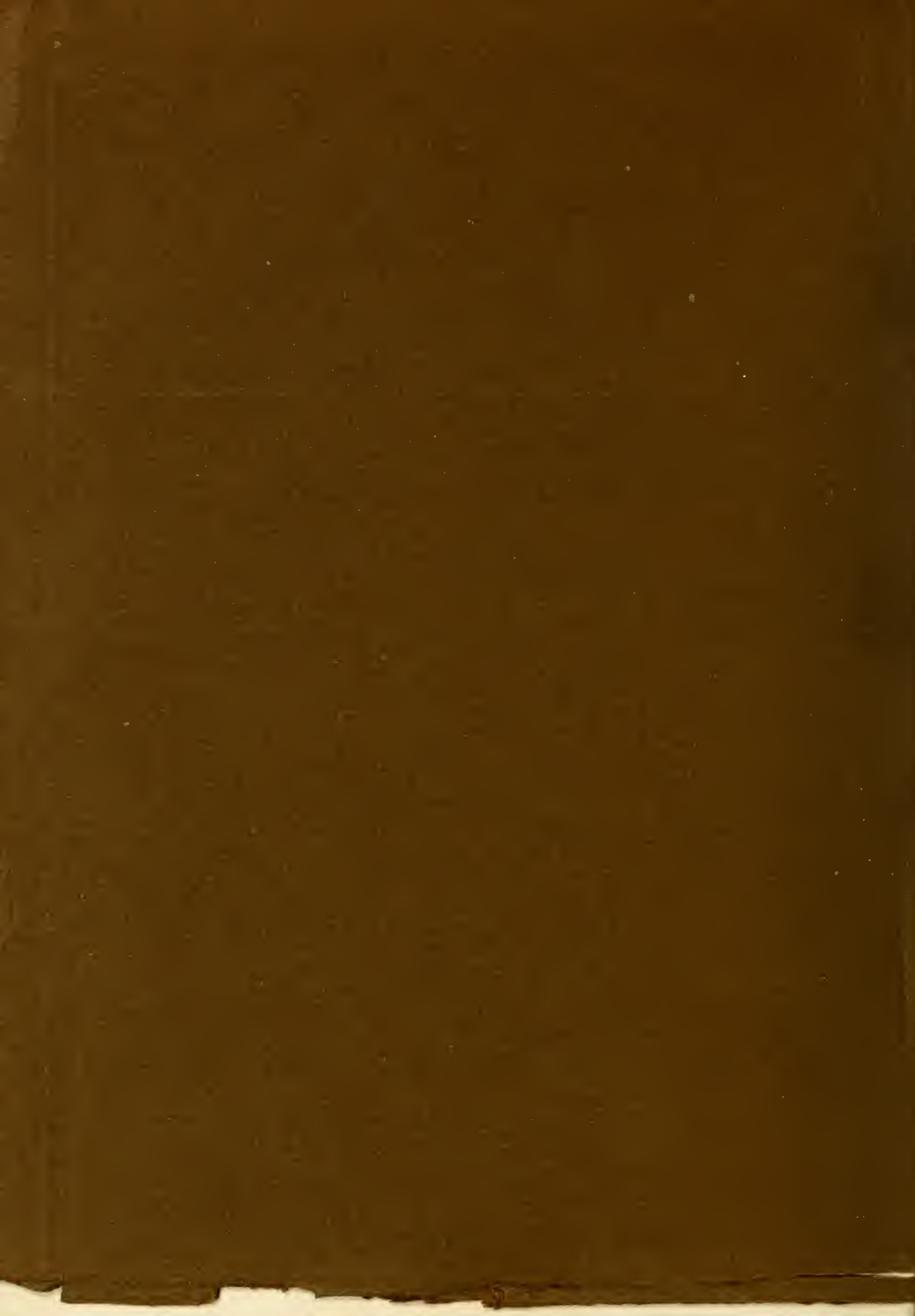


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JAMES MCNEILL WHISTLER



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873

5

JAMES McNEILL WHISTLER



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JAMES M^CNEILL
WHISTLER    
THE MAN AND HIS WORK
BY W. G. BOWDOIN

M. F. MANSFIELD & CO., NEW YORK
LONDON MDCCCCI

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To
MRS. EDWARD BOK
This volume is inscribed
In memory of
Some very pleasant hours spent at "The Grange."

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James McNeill Whistler

JAMES ABBOTT MCNEILL WHISTLER was born at Lowell, Massachusetts, in 1834. His mother was a Miss Winans, of Baltimore, whose family was one of the oldest, most aristocratic and highly distinguished of the South. Branches of her family are known to have extended beyond the borders of Maryland into Virginia and Georgia. Whistler's father, Major George Washington Whistler, was educated at the West Point Military Academy, from which institution he was graduated with high honors, and became an officer of the Corps of Engineers. He resigned from the army to become the consulting engineer for the St. Petersburg and Moscow Railway, a post obtained by him through the influence and upon the invitation of the Emperor Nicholas.

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Major Whistler was responsible for the building of many of the Russian railroads, and was held in the very highest esteem throughout the empire. The childhood of the youthful Whistler was passed in Russia, whither he went with his mother to join Major Whistler at St. Petersburg. Upon the death of his father, he returned to the United States and in 1851, when seventeen years of age, following thus far in his father's footsteps, he became a student at West Point. He was then called James Whistler. He subsequently called himself James McNeill Whistler.

According to statements printed in the *Book-buyer* by Thomas Wilson, U. S. A., retired, and a classmate of Whistler's at the Academy, it was during his fourth year at the West Point school that the pronounced skill as a draughtsman of Cadet Whistler attracted general attention. He dearly loved to make pen and ink sketches on camp stools, even on tent flaps and upon these unconventional canvases some of Whistler's earliest efforts appeared. The work thus done included some very beautiful heads.

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Archæan work by Whistler was also done in the line of pen drawings that were strikingly decorative features in the cadet autograph albums of the period.

The instructor in drawing and painting at the Military Academy during Whistler's student days there was Professor Robert Weir, who executed the well-known panel-picture in the rotunda of the Capitol building at Washington, entitled "The Departure of the Pilgrims." Whistler did not remain to be graduated from the West Point Academy. His ability was never in question, but he seemed unable to fix his mind upon mathematical studies. He preferred rather to draw and paint.

Whistler journeyed to Paris and there entered the Atelier of Gleyre, where he devoted himself to the study of art for two years. During his stay in Paris he numbered Bracquemond, Degas and Fantin-Latour among his friends and intimates. It was during this period also that he produced and published his first set of etchings, since known to print collectors as "The Little French Set."

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Whistler was industrious and painstaking, and it was likewise about this time that he painted "The White Girl," perhaps his first important picture. This picture was promptly rejected by the Jury of the Salon, but quickly made the youthful painter famous when subsequently exhibited at the Salon des Refusés. In 1863 Whistler removed to London from whence, on discovering its artistic charms, he found his way to Chelsea, where he, with varying fortunes, resided for many years before going to Paris. Because of his residence in this parish, many characteristic scenes of Chelsea's riverside have come from Whistler's hand, one of the earliest of which was "The Thames in Ice." It seems singular and very remarkable that with both Rossetti and Swinburne as fellow-residents by the Thames banks, it should have been left to the artist and not to the poets to see and to express the poetry of the place and its environments, but so it was, and while Whistler's art has immortalized Chelsea, the works of both Rossetti and Swinburne have not had similar and appreciable inspiration thus.

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Whistler was, for many years, a regular exhibitor at Burlington House, frequently with pronounced success. This was the case with his alphabetic contribution entitled "At the Piano," that passed from the exhibition into the possession of the late John Phillip, R.A., by purchase. His well known "Portrait of my Mother" in black and grey, was first rejected by the Burlington House Committee of Selection and was finally given a place on its exhibition walls only after a sharp struggle between the Committee and Sir William Boxall, R.A., now deceased. Sir William insisted upon the hanging of Whistler's picture and threatened to withdraw entirely from the council if this was not done, declaring that he would not go on record as being a member of a Committee that rejected such a meritorious painting. The "Portrait of my Mother" was in consequence finally reluctantly included in the exhibition at the Burlington House. The judgment of Sir William Boxall, as to the merit of this painting, was afterward fully confirmed by the awarding of the Gold Medal by

James McNeill Whistler

the Jury in Paris for this picture at the Salon of 1884. In 1891 this portrait was purchased by the French government for the Luxembourg Gallery. Whistler's pictures have in recent years frequently been seen at the Salon des Beaux Arts.

When the idea of building a gallery took shape in the mind of Sir Coutts Lindsay, Whistler was one of those to whom he turned for aid, council and coöperation. When the Grosvenor Gallery was at last completed and thrown open to the public in 1877, it was with the reservation of a large Whistler space. From 1877 to 1884, Whistler was a continuous contributor to the exhibitions held at this Gallery. The list of paintings here shown, includes "The Pacific," portraits of Miss Alexander, Miss Rosa Corder, Lady Archibald Campbell, Thomas Carlyle, Henry Irving as Philip II, and the "Nocturnes," (which were the inspiring cause of his action for libel against Mr. Ruskin. Judgment was nominally in Whistler's favor, but the damages awarded were only infinitesimal.)

An invitation to membership with the Society

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of British Artists came to Mr. Whistler in 1884, and in 1886 he was honored with election as the society's president. In 1885 his portrait of Señor Sarasate was given the place of honor in the Suffolk Street Galleries.

Mr. Whistler has never been a persistent general exhibitor in the public galleries grouped with miscellaneous art. Outside of the galleries previously here noted, his work has been seen but very sparingly. He prefers to exhibit in rooms that he has personally decorated with the view of securing harmony between pictures and gallery environment. The heterogeneous mass of assembled pictures that is only too frequently characteristic of even the best of the exhibitions, repels Mr. Whistler. There has, however, been a tendency in certain quarters to regard with some suspicion the scientific Whistler "arrangements" or "harmonies," that have been shown by him as innovations from time to time. The first of his notable exhibitions of this kind, was held in London in 1874, at 48 Pall Mall. This was followed by three similar exhibi-

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tions held at the rooms of the Fine Art Society. Etchings and Dry Points from motifs which were the result of a journey, and some Whistler Venetian Days were thus exhibited in 1880 and 1883. In 1881 he similarly massed some pastels he had executed in Venice, and in which glowed the Italian skies, delicate touches of the Grand Canal, happy gondoliers and things similar.

He took the little gallery at 133 New Bond Street decoratively in hand in 1884, and again in 1886, and each time the walls were covered with some sixty or seventy so-called "Notes, Harmonies and Nocturnes" of great beauty and charming freshness. The composition of the galleries was indicated by inscriptions such as "Arrangement in Brown and Gold," "Arrangement in Yellow and White," "Arrangement in Flesh-color and Grey," etc., etc. In each case the "butterfly" on the invitation card was given the appropriate color of the occasion.

In 1877, he produced the "Peacock Room," in which the charms of an art that is decorative are

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dominant. The "Peacock Room" is built up from a gold dining room, the ceiling and mural paintings of which consist of a series of designs in blue that were suggested and derived from the markings of the royal peacock. The panels formed by the closing of the shutters afford places whereupon are painted by Whistler wonderful studies of the stately bird, whose name gives title to the room. Provision is, in this gorgeous way, most delightfully made in the "Peacock Room" for a superb setting for "La Princesse du Pays de la Porcelaine." Several other London houses similarly testify to the skill of Whistler, and set forth some of his conceptions of color harmony in decorative requirements. Whistler has also worked to some extent in this way in Paris. The music room of his friend Sarasate has been done by Whistler in an arrangement of white, delicate pink and harmonizing yellow. All the furniture has also been specially designed with due regard for the purpose of the room.

It is possibly as an etcher that Whistler has received the apogee of appreciation and acceptance.

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There is, it must be said, a strength of contrast in mere black and white, which when skillfully arranged, combined and massed, in light and shade, and that which is intermediate, produces, at least under the inspiration of the Whistler needle, an art result in an etching that is, generally speaking, more readily accepted by the masses than is the work into which the more elaborate and more intricately complex element of color has been introduced. When one has revelled in admiration for black and white and studied the charm that is inherent, the way is somewhat prepared for the better and more ample understanding of the subtleties that belong to color. The portrayal results that lie within attainment grasp are very great. There is a brilliant firmness and emphasis of touch compassed by the etcher and his lines. They frequently suggest far more than they directly reveal, all of which easily spells fascination to a larger extent even for the observer who entirely lacks art education and is minus advanced culture, than is the case with more elaborate essays in color and color combination.

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Whatever may be said of Whistler as an etcher, certain it is that proofs of his plates command high prices in the market and print collectors vie one with another in their eager search for them and the ownership thereof. Whistler is, however, a many-sided man and his etchings have really always been hand and glove with his paintings. The following letter from Joseph Pennell shows the estimate of at least one who is appreciative of the Whistler etchings:

MR. WHISTLER'S ETCHINGS.

The Editor of *The Daily Chronicle*.

Sir:—Mr. Whistler's plate, "Black Lion Wharf," or "The Black Lion," a reproduction of which is, I believe, to be published in to-day's *Chronicle*, is one of the greatest engraved plates that has been produced in modern times. I would even say that it is the greatest etching of modern times were it not for the fact that it is but one of a set known as "The Thames Series," etched by the master some thirty-five years ago. This "Thames Series," al-

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though not as I propose to point out, the first etched work of Mr. Whistler, is, however, the first of that long succession of series which he has been issuing from that time until the present.

In the Thames plates, it was Mr. Whistler's aim to show the river as it was in 1859, and each one of them is a little portrait of a place, a perfect work of art. For the rendering, as Mr. Whistler has rendered them, of these old houses in which every brick and every tile has been studied, every window frame rightly drawn, every bit of color truly suggested, is as much portraiture, and as difficult, to accomplish, as to give the portrait of the old lighterman sitting in his barge. So difficult is it indeed, that but two men in the whole history of the world have done such a thing. The one a Dutchman of the seventeenth century, the other an American happily living and working to-day. The one, Rembrandt, died virtually uncared for and ignored by his contemporaries; if the other lives and still works, it is only because he has the courage of a great artist, which has enabled him, during

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a whole lifetime, to fight through the insults and abuse that have been hurled at him unceasingly from the highest critical authority in England, as John Ruskin was considered at one time, to the veriest halfpenny a liner; none was too high or too low to revile this artist, the man who certainly—we all know it now—will carry on the traditions of art to future generations. Now everything that he has produced is perfect, he is told; but as he himself has said, if it has been found good to-day, why was it not also good at the time it was brought forth?

As I have said, these etchings are perfect portraits of the London that we of the younger generation have never seen, but Mr. Whistler has made it so real for us that it will live forever. We may talk of Hollar, of Canaletto, of Piranesi, of Hogarth, but not even that master makes us feel the reality of London as Mr. Whistler does.

Among the other plates, in the same set, are the "Forge," a dry point, excessively rare; the "Limehouse," a view down the Reach at low tide, with tangled barges lying in the mud; the "Lime Burn-

James McNeill Whistler

ers" with its beautiful suggestion of light and shade; "Wapping;" the "Custom House," which even Mr. Hamerton was compelled to praise in a niggardly fashion, though to his last day he never had any true understanding of the art of Mr. Whistler. While this series alone is enough to win immortality for any man, it marks but one period in his life's work. The first etchings, I believe, that Mr. Whistler produced were a series of maps made for the United States Coast Survey, and in their original state are, I fancy, virtually unknown. At any rate I do not think they were ever published, as the artist and the chief of the survey had, I have heard, diametrically opposite opinions as to what a tree should look like in a map. Really the first series of plates, I think, is that known as "The French Series," possibly because, as I have always understood, it was made in Germany, though published in France. Among these are "The Unsafe Tenement," "The Cabaret," and several other plates perfectly well known. Next came many portraits and plates, from Chelsea to the Lower River, from Paris to London,

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among them the "Thames Series," which latter won for their author the strongest kind of recognition in the land of the other great etcher, Holland, if, at that time, nowhere else. Artists—I don't mean painters with titles before and after their names—have, however, always appreciated the art of Mr. Whistler.

But from 1860 to 1880, although very many plates were made, I do not think Mr. Whistler brought out any consecutive series. About 1881 he went to Venice, and after an absence from London of a year or more—his longest from the metropolis until he shook forever the dust of this unappreciative place off his feet—he brought back some fifty or sixty coppers which are now called masterpieces—true, they always were by artists—but were then known as "another crop of Mr. Whistler's little jokes," by that truthful person, Henry Labouchere. This, however, was mild. A chorus of abuse was uttered by Frederick Wedmore, P. G. Hamerton, Harry Quilter, and many others who, fortunately for themselves, did not sign their names. But those

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who did have ever since been trying to the best of their ability to prove, that whenever they write about Mr. Whistler, they always make themselves ridiculous. Since then Mr. Whistler has gone on steadily working. Several plates were done in provincial France; still others in Holland. One or two studies of long lines of canals, windmills in the distance, are in feeling much the same as Rembrandt, but in line much superior to Mr. Whistler's only rival. In fact Sir Francis Seymour Haden said not very long ago that if he were compelled to give up his Rembrandts or his Whistlers, the Rembrandts would go first—an appreciation that was certainly genuine. After the French work came a Belgian set; but I am not sure if these have ever been regularly published; and I do not believe I am revealing any secrets when I say that I have seen the first proofs of another French series which, when they are issued, will delight the handful of people who know, by their beauty of line, their grace of subject, their exquisite handling. In this last Paris series, when the world sees it, all save the critics, will be com-

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pelled to acknowledge that here are consummate plates by the master. All his work is alike perfect. It has only been produced under different circumstances, and is an attempt to render different effects or situations. Therefore the methods vary, but the results are always the same—great. Consequently the “Black Lion Wharf,” is appropriate, not only as an illustration of the riverside of London a quarter of a century ago, but as showing a characteristic example of the marvellous work of the master. And it proves conclusively also, as I have pointed out before, as *The Daily Chronicle* has pointed out as well, that great artists to-day, in showing their work to the public through the Press, are doing but what the great masters of the past did when they showed theirs to the same public through the Church. I do not expect the critics to understand me—that, however, is unimportant. But I would say to the readers of *The Daily Chronicle* that never in the history of the world has there been such a series of remarkable drawings published by a daily paper, and never before have two great artists like Mr.

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Whistler and Sir Edward Burne-Jones contributed to a daily journal. Their motives may have been deliberately mis-stated, but one of their real reasons is their interest in the most striking experiment in modern journalism. There is another point which this plate of Mr. Whistler's emphasises—that work which is really good looks well under any conditions.

JOSEPH PENNELL.

London, February 22, 1895.

In 1877, Whistler turned his attention to lithography. He did so not because it chanced to be a passing fancy or the fashion of the hour, but for the reason that lithography chanced to be just the method of artistic expression which sometimes met his artistic needs and requirements when nothing else did so. In his lithographs, as is the case also with his etchings, his pastels, likewise his paintings, there is a freshness and a spontaneity that individualizes them and stamps them with distinction. They are replete with originality and a personality that is the triumphant characteristic of Whistler's

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whole work. The lithographic stone is not a fit experimental medium for the artist who does not know how to draw. The lines and color, everything that has a place in the composition, must remain as they are put upon the stone. The limitations of lithography are, however, fully recognized by Whistler. It would indeed be a surprise if from an artist who has given us the portrait in the Luxembourg, "The Thames in Ice," and other Chelsea studies, "The Little White Girl" (not to be confounded with "The White Girl"), the Carlyle and that harmony in grey and green, "Miss Alexander," we should suddenly receive a lithograph that was insignificant or commonplace, just because it chanced to be a lithograph.

Mr. Whistler has never been driven to find his picture subjects elsewhere than in the life that is just around him. Whatever the medium in which he chooses to give voice to his art there is in his immediate surroundings ample material. The tumble-down shop, the careless and often unconsidered turn of a woman's head, the formal garden and its

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terraces, the seething life of London or Paris, the fishing fleets and their tall masts, even the thick English fog that usually repels, all these things furnish motifs to Whistler and he has played with such material and fixed it upon an appropriate art base, to live and give eye pleasure and solace to others from his point of view quite as certainly as have the master poets played with rhythm and cadence in verse that shall give ear pleasure. Mr. Whistler has made many portraits on stone. He has worked out of doors and it has well been said of him that he stands preëminent among painters as the interpreter of night. At least some of his popular fame rests upon his "Nocturnes." There is much to be said in favor of well executed pictures that are founded upon twilight or the night which follows. The high lights disappear entirely, it is true, but in the place of them, there is an ineffable softness of landscape, a subduing of the city and town and out of their encompassing darkness gleams, if the artist will but be faithful, candles of artificial lights, the art combination possibilities of

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which are supreme in such hands as Whistler's. The world is a beautiful world if one sees it as Whistler sees it, and common things take on new and unsuspected beauty which when finally seen under Whistler's inspiration makes us marvel that it had so long remained hidden. The "Chelsea Rags," "The Smith, Place du Dragon," "Sunday, Lyme Regis," "The River, from the Savoy," "The Drury Lane," "The Little Model Reading" even the "Butcher's Dog" are full common enough and yet they are each of them lovely when we see them with Whistler's eyes. That he had high abilities as a draughtsman, full knowledge, and an absolute command of technique is made manifest from his lithographic studies of the nude or partially nude, model. These tend toward a completeness of the lithographic series that he has given us and furnish as well excellent opportunities for judging of his artistic equipment. The crucial test of an artist lies often in his drawing of the human figure. By it he stands or falls and his capacity or incapacity is measured. It is held that there is nothing more difficult in art

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than figure-drawing and when this is done by lithographic means the difficulty is greatly intensified. Whistler is known to have executed 140 lithographs, 130 of which are described in a catalogue compiled by Thomas R. Way that was published in London in 1896. Of these 106 were shown at the Grolier Club (New York) in April, 1900.

Mr. Whistler's little model sits reading, she reclines, and again stands by a large bowl. The beauty of her nudity is revealed and deified by him. Into these studies he has crowded grace of contour, line harmony, posing that is full of charm and purity, and characterized the *tout ensemble* with a daintiness that is scarcely over-estimated by the term flawless. "Art happens," Mr. Whistler has said, but it only happens where there is intelligence and skill in the painter as he works. Art does not "happen" to the artist who works without creative originality, individuality of observation and a directness of expression that is unswerving. It lingers and lags and sinks into desuetude.

One frequently hears Whistler spoken of as,

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what in the real sense of the word he is,—“an impressionist.” There may be needful reservations in the term when applied to Whistler, but in so far as it is but the essence and spirit of a given subject that he considers worthy of attention, not merely some isolated quality whether of line, aspect, texture or the supremacy of color—he must take his place of necessity among the impressionists. From the standpoint of Whistler, Industry is not more needful to the orator than it is to the artist. He maintains in “*L’Envoi*” that “Industry in Art is a necessity—not a virtue—and any evidence of the same in the production is a blemish, not a quality;—a proof, not of achievement, but of absolutely insufficient work, for work alone will efface the footsteps of work.” The academies and schools of art are intolerable to him because by the vogue machine methods that obtain almost universally among them all, the principal product is too apt to be only the amateur. And yet he would not do away with the art schools because as he says, “They are harmless, and it is just as well, when genius appears that he

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should find the fire alight, and the room warm, easels close to his hand, and the model sitting; though I make no doubt but that he'll immediately alter her *pose!*"

One cannot read from Whistler's published lectures or his books, even if he has not seen his pictures, without being strongly impressed with the idea that he is a serious worker, and that he has considered his art from other standpoints than that of mere craftsmanship, and when his pictures are studied with any care, the ill-natured and far-reaching criticism of John Ruskin becomes all the more surprising, viz:—

"For Mr. Whistler's own sake, no less than for the protection of the purchaser, Sir Coutts Lindsay ought not to have admitted works into the gallery in which the ill-educated conceit of the artist so nearly approaches the aspect of wilful imposture. I have seen and heard much of cockney impudence before now; but never expected to hear a coxcomb ask two hundred guineas for flinging a pot of paint in the public face." It may have applied with force

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to the particular picture exhibited at the Grosvenor Gallery in which "Battersea Bridge" was the nocturnal motif, but the account of it all as set forth in Whistler's book "The Gentle Art of Making Enemies" shows something of the artist's eccentricity. In the book Whistler stands out clear and sharp in a strong white light, and our judgment of him based upon it alone, makes of him an entirely different man than as if one had heart to heart contact with him. It is hard to reconcile the evidence brought out at the Ruskin trial, with the language of a writer in *The Saturday Review* which follows: "His color is so exquisite, his actual method of producing the effect he desires by means of his brush so masterly, and all this adroit technique is so completely part of a very fine and a very peculiar personal temperament, that we are not much surprised that those who enjoy these things sincerely—a limited company—use, to express their pleasure, language which savors of extravagance. Mr. Whistler has a rare gift in drawing necks and waists and ankles. He excels in rendering the

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undulation of a graceful human body in the act of turning."

"Some impressions of Whistler by Julian Hawthorne, as printed in the *Independent*, are in part as below: He was, twenty-five years ago, Italian-looking; he was dark, with finely modeled features and black hair, and careless but brilliant and searching dark eyes. A little twist of black moustache was on his upper lip and a patch of black imperial decorated the centre of his square handsome chin. In the midst of the tangled hair over his high forehead was the renowned white lock, which appears in all the caricatures of him; as if the finger of genius had touched him there with an affectionate caress and marked him out from other men and artists. Both as an artist and a man he belongs in a class by himself. His step was light and rather short and his shoulders had an impatient twitch as he moved to and fro. There is an immense and sweet good nature in Whistler which is hidden from the public by the notorious sharpness of his epigrams. He will tolerate not the slightest

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suspicion of humbug or pretense; but there is the tenderest, most fragrant human feeling in him for all that is good and true in mankind."

Whistler has an individuality that is very intense, and it may be said of him with more truth than is often the case where others are concerned, there is perhaps no more interesting personality in the whole artistic world than is he. Mr. Whistler has lived to see himself famous and to enjoy the fruits of his fame. With his temperament it would indeed be extraordinary if he were not something of a *poseur* and we may easily believe it of him that when he goes to London, it is always with an outfitting that is so very elaborate and unusual that when he appears on the city's streets he is sure to attract attention. In the long, black overcoat that he affects, with his French top hat, the brim of which stands straight out, carrying in his hand a long, thin cane or wand of bamboo, the London small boy scents a celebrity and in crowds they worshipfully follow him, until even the stoic smiles to see him pass. His boots and gloves fit him and he

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wears the eccentricities of genius with his clothes. He is happily, still in the full vigor of his artistic power and is probably the most observed and discussed of all living artists. There may be a scattering remnant to whom the productions of Whistler are still unwelcome; it is true that the bulk of the small coteries who make up the artistic community have for the most part agreed that as an etcher and also as a painter of power no one deserves higher respect mingled with admiration. His lithographic work has previously been noticed. As an etcher Mr. Whistler long since became acknowledged as a master. In evidence of this it may be noted that several of his scarcer proofs have already reached the round hundred pounds in money value. It is some time since Mr. Whistler has employed his etching needle, but there are those who know the versatility and latent power of the man and they will not be surprised if he once more becomes devoted to the plate.

It took much longer to convince the public that Mr. Whistler is correspondingly great and con-

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scientious as a painter in oils. Mr. Ruskin's libel and the Baronet's Valentine discussion relative to the Lady Eden picture, have suggested grave doubts in the minds of some, and it is only within very recent years that the painter has been generally admitted to be the great master he undoubtedly is. Should any one still feel skeptical, let him cast aside bias and visit the gallery of the Luxembourg, and with prejudice eliminated, endeavor to place the painter of "My Mother" in his proper position. If he does not find this great canvas *one* of the most serious, if not *the* most serious, picture in the Collection, he has yet to know and grasp what is really great in Art.

The "Piano" is one of Mr. Whistler's earlier pictures, and became known to the present day public on its being exhibited at the first Knightsbridge Exhibition in 1898. It is one of the few pictures Mr. Whistler ever sent to the Royal Academy, where it was exhibited in 1860. John Philip, R.A., the painter of Spanish pictures, bought it at the Exhibition and thus

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manifested his hearty appreciation of the young painter.

The charm of the picture lies in the masterly simplicity of the lines of the piano and the pictures on the wall, as contrasted with the flowing lines of the two opposing figures—the mother, gravely seated at the piano, and the little girl absorbed in her listening. The child's figure is in a gauzy white dress and with folded feet, looking intently to the player, has been held to be one of the most perfect creations of modern art.

It is but a portrait, and yet it conjures up all that is finest in a young girl and renders the composition most satisfactory and makes of it one that is seldom equalled and more rarely excelled.

Let but this picture be placed as a test beside a Gainsborough, a Van Dyck or even a Rembrandt, and it will at once be seen to what a high level the painter of it has attained.

Whistler's work in the art field is often of agreeable, though sometimes of incomplete and apparently wayward, certainly of capricious perform-

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ance. The strictures of Mr. Ruskin were of course pronounced upon some of the less desirable of his designs. The "nocturnes" and "arrangements" by Whistler were argued pro and con, in his Ruskin controversy, to a considerable extent, but their value and merits did not finally and conclusively pass beyond a stage that remained somewhat problematical. It is unfortunate for Mr. Whistler that the issuance of his pamphlet, "Art and Art Critics," and some other similar publications, should have made him known as the painter of his least important works. His worthier efforts have been forced into a subordinate place. The painter of the Luxembourg picture, and of Mr. Carlyle has been forgotten in the limelight publicity and familiarity that has been given to the "Arrangement in Black and Gold."

The historian of "Wapping," the recorder of "Billingsgate," the pioneer discoverer of the many charms of "Chelsea," lags sadly behind the etcher of "The Sun and Swagger of St. James's Street." A proper appreciation of Whistler then signifies a

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closer and more careful study of his more commendable work before judgment is warped and distorted by the narrow contemplation only of his work that has inspired that ill-advised notoriety that is a poor substitute for celebrity and which is after all but a spurious equivalent for fame. Certain judges of Whistler's controverted endeavors, having to do with color, form and line, have given them confined fellowship with the art of wall paper, the floor cloth and the tessellated pavement. This may or may not be deserved, but it must be said in all candor that there is some technical foundation for such classification.

As a decorative painter, Whistler stands pre-eminent, but in his "Nocturnes" there is not only an utter lack of definition, but one searches in vain for gradation, and if they speak to the eye they are dumb to the mind of the beholder. It has been well said that a lined group of these "Nocturnes" on the upper panels of a lofty chamber, might, and doubtless would, afford even to the wall coverings of William Morris a welcome and possibly justifi-

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able alternative, but that it is in vain that we endeavor to receive them as cabinet pictures particularly with the scale limitations that characterize them. They have a merit of their own, that is not by any means borrowed, but this merit is unfortunately only that of agreeable and restful simplicity if not of emptiness. Mr. Whistler has concerned himself but little with the interest of life—the interest of humanity, but yet he is not totally indifferent to the race to which he belongs. He has discovered and exemplified the art possibilities that lurk in the peacock and some of his portraits are painted with admirable expressiveness. Mannerism has crept into his work, but the veracity of effect that he has generally been able to secure is certainly noteworthy.

That Whistler has a passport to fame, few will deny, but it is more than likely that this fame will be secured because of his etchings rather than his paintings. If Whistler has a serious fault where his etchings are concerned, it lies in his having etched too much. His themes are legion because

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they are many. He has not only essayed landscapes but he has drawn a tree in "Kensington Garden" and likewise a tree in the foreground of the "Isle St. Louis, Paris," but some of his trees lack the silvan qualities. Vegetable attributes are woefully lacking for example in the "Isle St. Louis" tree. It might equally well be a shell in the process of exploding as a tree. A critic is indeed captious when he demands that a given work of art shall be without flaw, but even the layman has good reason to expect that the faults shall not outweigh the merits. And in the case of this particular tree this can scarcely be held to be true. Some of Mr. Whistler's interiors are great. "The Kitchen" is thus typical. Two things, it will be easily seen, have largely occupied Mr. Whistler as an artist, and these two things are the arrangement of colors in harmonious masses, and the grouping of light and shade. This has served in an accented way as his life inspiration, and the best results he has been able to secure are to be found in decorative art, in work not dominated by a subject. Some of Whistler's

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finest achievements in the study of light and shade are to be found in some half dozen of his etchings that belong to that series in which the artist portrays for our curious pleasure, the common sights and commonplace features of the shores and banks of the Thames. Quaintness of form stands out boldly in this series and lends a most pleasing charm to the lines of wharf and warehouse, that present, theoretically, at least, most unpromising art subjects. With originality and enthusiasm has he seized and fixed upon his etched plate the delightful outline oddities arising from roof, window, building and their appurtenances, in the light changes that come and go. That Whistler has serious limitations is seen in his defective figure drawing and again in his narrow power, when compared with the great marine painters, of drawing the forms of water, whether a river, like the Thames, is chosen, or the restless sea, with its smooth surface, or its curling billows. Some of the best of Whistler's work in etching that preserves studies of quaint places that either have, or soon will have, disap-

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peared, and but for these etchings would be forgotten, are "The London Bridge," "The Little Limehouse," "Billingsgate," "Hungerford Bridge," "Thames Police" and "Black Lion Wharf." In these, at least, his art, if at other times, and in other places, it has manifested faults that merit the condemnation of the critic, has shown qualities that compel admiration. If he had done nothing else but these, Whistler's future would not be oblivion by any manner of means.

Some of the art theories of Whistler, while they are full of the fruit of his own experience, are also typical of the art cosmos. He says, for example: "No man alive is life-size except the recruit who is measured as he enters the regiment, and then the only man who sees him 'life size' is the sergeant who measures him, and all that he sees of him is the end of his nose; when he is able to see his toes the man ceases to be life size." The Whistler philosophy that is of record here bristles with truth as a porcupine is armed with quills. Whatever else Mr. Whistler may be, it is certain that he has

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been and still is a close observer. It is evident that he knows something of the vagaries of the masses and of those who love to place themselves among the upper classes, when he writes: "The notion that I paint flesh lower in tone than it is in nature, is entirely based upon the popular superstition as to what flesh really is—when seen on canvas; for the people never look at nature with any sense of its pictorial appearance—for the reason, by the way, they also never look at a picture with any sense of nature, but, unconsciously from habit, with reference to what they have seen in other pictures. Now in the usual "pictures of the year" there is but one flesh that shall do service under all circumstances, whether the person painted be in the soft light of the room or out in the glare of the open. The one aim of the unsuspecting painter is to make his man "stand out" from the frame, never doubting that, on the contrary, he should really, and in truth absolutely does, stand within the frame, and at a depth behind it equal to the distance at which the painter sees his model. The

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frame, is indeed, the window through which the painter looks at his model and nothing could be more offensively inartistic than this brutal attempt to thrust the model on the hitherside of this window! Yet this is the false condition of things to which all have become accustomed and in the stupendous effort to bring it about, exaggeration has been exhausted and the traditional means of the incompetent can no further go. Lights have been heightened until the white of the tube only remains; shadows have been deepened until black alone is left. Scarcely a feature stays in its place, so fierce is its intention of firmly coming forth; and in the midst of this unseemly struggle for prominence the gentle truth has but a sorry chance, falling flat and flavorless, and without force. The master himself from Madrid beside this monster success of mediocrity would be looked upon as mild: *Beau bien sûr, mais pas dans le mouvement*. Whereas, could the people be induced to turn their eyes but for a moment with the fresh power of comparison, upon their fellow-creatures as they pass

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in the gallery, they might be made dimly to perceive (though I doubt it, so blind is their belief in the bad) how little they resemble the impudent images on the walls! how "quiet" in color they are:—how "grey"—how "low in tone!" And then it might be explained to their riveted intelligence how they had mistaken meretriciousness for mastery, and by what mean methods the imposture had been practiced upon them."

Whistler has deliberately sought to avoid rather than to introduce into his works anything that savors of what is sometimes known as the "literary quality." The difficulty that arose because of the consequent lack of name inspiration has been admirably overcome by the use of such terms as "Harmony," "Nocturne," "Arrangement," "Symphony" and other musical derivatives that he has boldly applied to his art creations, notwithstanding the fact that such usages are without precedent.

If Whistler cared for convention he would have sought out other names than such as these: "Note in Blue and Opal," "Crepuscle in Flesh Color and

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Green," "Little Grey Note," "Caprice in Purple and Gold," and again a "Variation in Flesh Color and Green," but he has used these titles because each "note" is symbolic of some obviously emphasized color that to continue the use of musical similitudes corresponds to the key-note with which there must be harmony unless there be discord.

Whistler has exercised a mighty influence upon contemporary art, just how much it is difficult to estimate, and if there be a tendency in such estimation it would emphatically be toward under-estimation. Without taking into consideration Whistler's own pupils, many a man has given unmistakable evidences of having followed paths in the maze that Whistler had first blazed. Men were somewhat similarly influenced thus by the grotesqueness of Aubrey Beardsley, but not so largely as by Whistler and his teachings. In both cases the influence was felt by men who would have scorned to plagiarize but who borrowed, unconsciously perhaps, but borrowed nevertheless, and because of such borrowing, because of the use of a Whistler

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accessory that had inherent art value of course, but which bore the Whistler Hall mark, the borrowers tinted their own works with something of a foreign charm and thus obtained from the unobservant multitude a popularity for their own inferior productions, that without the Whistler influence would have halted before bestowal.

Whistler is famous for his controversies. Ruskin and Du Maurier are but two well-known instances of a long and expanding line of persons with whom Whistler has differed polemically. His crusades against what he regards as unjust newspaper criticism by pamphlet and by letter present him as possessed of more than ordinary literary power, and because of the keenness of his counter-attack and sword-like repartee, he is a redoubtable antagonist. Holding as he does that only the practicing painter has the capacity to judge of art, he is forever on the alert to catch the professional critic in error and then to securely nail the discovered error, and to flaunt it without mercy. Their blunders and inaccuracies are

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held up by him to unrelenting ridicule whenever there is opportunity for so doing until he has become a terror to those whom Whistler regards as his "natural prey." It is because of this that Whistler has sometimes been looked upon as ungracious and forever antagonistic.

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The following anecdotes relating to Whistler shed luminous rays of light upon the man and his personality and because of them our knowledge of him is better than it could possibly be without them:

A commissioner, representing the American art section of a certain exposition, was to arrive in Paris a while ago to arrange with the American painters and sculptors resident there for their contributions. Wishing to be brisk and business-like, he wrote ahead to several artists stating that he would be in Paris on a certain day, and at a certain hotel, and naming an hour at which he hoped each man would call upon him. On his schedule for the day was the name of McNeil Whistler and the

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hour "4:30 precisely." The note he received is worthy of the author of "The Gentle Art of Making Enemies":

"Dear Sir:—I have received your letter announcing that you will arrive in Paris on the —th. I congratulate you. I have never been able, and never shall be able, to be anywhere at '4:30 precisely.' Yours most faithfully,

"J. McN. WHISTLER."

And again says Vance Thompson: "A Colorado millionaire—extremely millionaire—one who is getting up an art gallery, went to Whistler's studio in the Rue du Bac. He glanced casually at the pictures on the walls—'symphonies' in rose and gold, in blue and grey, in brown and green.

"How much for the lot?" he asked, with the confidence of one who owns gold mines.

"Four millions," said Whistler.

"What!"

"My posthumous prices," and the painter added, "Good morning."

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In the following there is just enough of characteristic likeness to make the portrait recognizable in spite of exaggeration:

“I handed the servant my card, saying: “I wish to see Mr. Whistler.” The servant withdrew, and reappeared presently with a printed slip of paper on which I read the following words: “Who is the greatest painter in the world?”

I bethought myself a minute, and my mind's eye saw a long and brilliant pageant, from Giotto down to the present day; then I wrote this name—“Whistler.” I was asked to step in.

The studio was dyed grey, so to speak—grey walls, grey canvases, grey easels, grey chairs; Whistler his back turned towards me, in a grey suit, and on a dias a grey lady with grey hair, grey dress, grey skin, and grey gloves, was staring with grey eyes rather anxiously into my puzzled features.

Whistler laid down palette and brushes, crossed his arms like Napoleon, and swung round on me. Without leaving me time to utter a greeting, he said sarcastically:

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“Parbleu! this is a nice get-up to come and see me in, to be sure. I must request you to leave this place instantly.” Then turning to Madame: “These scribblers, rag-smudgers, incroyable! Why, it is, perfectly preposterous! Did you ever hear such a dissonance in your life, Madame?” pointing with his right thumb over his shoulder. “His tie is in G Major, and I am painting this symphony in E Minor. I will have to start it again.” He turned on his heels towards me, and said: “Take that roaring tie of yours off, you miserable wretch; remove it instantly.”

Being an adept in the gentle art of making friends, I removed my scarlet tie as quickly as possible.

The moment it had disappeared in my pocket he heaved a sigh of relief. “Thank goodness,” he said, shading his eyes, “my sight is perfectly deaf.”

“I am so sorry, Mr. Whistler.”

“Whistler, sir? Whistler? That’s not my name!” he roared.

“I beg your pardon.”

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"That is not my name. I say you don't seem to know your own language"—shrugging his shoulders.

I looked at him sheepishly.

"W-h is pronounced whhh—Whhhhistler, Baa!" and he dropped his eye-glass from his eye.

"Thank you, Mr. Whhhhistler. The object of my interview is to hear some of your ideas on the painter's art in general and yours more particularly. As you are probably aware, there are still a lot of people who are at a loss to understand either your paintings or your etchings. I should like to help the world to appreciate your revelations.

"Revelations! I like that; that's good," said Whistler, "but, my dear sir," he continued now in quite a different tone, "that is impossible. They would never understand. It's much too high, too great. Why, I myself am compelled to stand on tiptoes to reach my own height, metaphorically speaking. To begin with, you, my dear sir, are nobody, nothing from my point of view—just a conglomeration of bad colours. Why on earth, man,

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do you wear a brown jacket with blue trousers?
That's like B flat in G Major, do you see?"

"I can't say I do."

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A WHISTLER BIBLIOGRAPHY

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Whistler vs. Ruskin.

Art and Art Critics.

Etchings and Dry Points.

Venice.

Second Series:—

Nocturnes, Marines and Chevalet Pieces. Small collection kindly lent by their owners.

“Notes,” “Harmonies,” “Nocturnes.”

“Ten o’Clock.”

“Ten o’Clock.” Lecture delivered in London, Cambridge and at Oxford.

“The Gentle Art of Making Enemies.”

“The Baronet and the Butterfly.”

Many books and magazines contain extended notices of Whistler and his name appears in numerous art catalogues. There is also a long list of portraits and caricatures of him that was once published in the *N. Y. Literary Collector*.

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AVERY COLLECTION OF WHISTLER ETCHINGS AND LITHOGRAPHS

IN THE PRINT DEPARTMENT OF THE LENOX LIBRARY

Numbered according to the Frederick Wetmore
Catalogue. London, 1899

1. Early Portrait of Whistler.
2. Annie Haden.
3. The Dutchman Holding the Glass.
4. Liverdun.
5. La Rétameuse.
6. En Plein Soleil.
7. The Unsafe Tenement.
8. The Dog on the Kennel.
9. La Mère Gérard.
10. La Mère Gérard Stooping.

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11. Street at Saverne.
12. Gretchen at Heidelberg.
13. Little Arthur.
14. La Vieille aux Loques.
15. Annie.
16. La Marchande de Moutarde.
17. The Rag Gatherers.
18. Fumette.
19. The Kitchen.
20. The Title to the French Set.
21. Auguste Delâtre.
22. A Little Boy.
23. Seymour.
24. Annie, Seated.
25. Reading by Lamp-light.
26. The Music Room.
27. Soupe à Trois Sous.
28. Bibi Valentin.
29. Reading in Bed.
30. Bibi Lalouette.
31. The Wine Glass.
32. Greenwich Pensioner.

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33. Greenwich Park.
34. Nursemaid and Child.
35. Thames Warehouses from Thames Tunnel
Pier.
36. Westminster Bridge.
37. Limehouse.
38. A Wharf.
39. Tyzac, Whiteley and Co.
40. Black Lion Wharf.
41. The Pool.
42. Thames Police.
43. 'Long Shore Man.
44. The Lime-Burner.
45. Billingsgate.
46. The Landscape with the Horse.
47. Arthur Seymour.
48. Becquet.
49. Astruc, a Literary Man.
50. Fumette, Standing.
51. Fumette's Bent Head.
52. Whistler.
53. Drouet.

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- 54. Finette.
- 55. Paris: The Isle de la Cité.
- 56. Venus.
- 57. Annie Hayden.
- 58. Mr. Mann.
- 59. The Penny Boat.
- 60. Rotherhithe.
- 61. Axenfeld.
- 62. The Engraver.
- 63. The Forge.
- 64. Joe.
- 65. The Miser.
- 66. Vauxhall Bridge.
- 67. Millbank.
- 68. The Punt.
- 69. Sketching.
- 70. Westminster Bridge in Progress.
- 71. The Little Wapping.
- 72. The Little Pool.
- 73. Tiny Pool.
- 74. Ratcliffe Highway.
- 75. Encamping.

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- 76. Ross Winans.
- 77. The Storm.
- 78. Little Smithfield.
- 79. Cadogan Pier.
- 80. Old Hungerford Bridge.
- 81. Chelsea Wharf.
- 82. Amsterdam, Etched from the Tolhuis.
- 83. Weary.
- 84. Shipping at Liverpool.
- 85. Chelsea Bridge and Church.
- 86. Speke Hall.
- 87. The Model Resting.
- 89. 'Swan' Brewery.
- 90. Fosco.
- 91. The Velvet Dress.
- 92. The Little Velvet Dress.
- 94. Fanny Leyland
- 95. Elinor Leyland.
- 96. Florence Leyland.
- 98. Tatting.
- 100. Maude, Seated.
- 101. The Beach.

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- 102. Tillie: A Model.
- 103. Seated Girl.
- 112. A Child on a Couch.
- 114. Steamboats off the Tower.
- 115. The Little Forge.
- 116. Two Ships.
- 117. The Piano.
- 118. The Scotch Widow.
- 120. The Dam Wood.
- 121. Shipbuilder's Yard.
- 122. The Guitar-Player.
- 123. London Bridge.
- 124. Price's Candle-Works.
- 125. Battersea: Dawn.
- 126. The Muff.
- 128. The White Tower.
- 130. A Sketch from Billingsgate.
- 131. Fishing-Boats-Hastings.
- 132. Wych Street.
- 134. Free-Trade Wharf.
- 135. The Thames towards Erith.
- 136. Lindsay Houses.

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- 137. From Pickled Herring Stairs.
- 140. St. James's Street.
- 141. Battersea Bridge.
- 142. Whistler, with the White Lock.
- 143. The Large Pool.
- 144. The 'Adam and Eve' Old Chelsea.
- 145. Putney Bridge.
- 146. The Little Putney.
- 147. Hurlingham.
- 148. Fulham.
- 149. The Little Venice.
- 150. Nocturne.
- 151. The Little Mast.
- 152. The Little Lagoon.
- 153. The Palaces.
- 154. The Doorway.
- 155. The Piazzetta.
- 156. The Traghetto.
- 157. The Riva.
- 158. Two Doorways.
- 159. The Beggars.
- 160. The Mast.

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- 161. Doorway and Vine.
- 162. Wheelwright.
- 163. San Biagio.
- 164. Bead-Stringers.
- 165. Turkeys.
- 166. Fruit-Stall.
- 167. San Giorgio.
- 168. Nocturne Palaces.
- 169. Long Lagoon.
- 170. Temple.
- 171. The Bridge.
- 172. Upright Venice.
- 173. Little Court.
- 174. Lobster Pots.
- 175. The Riva, Number Two.
- 176. Drury Lane.
- 177. The Balcony.
- 178. Fishing-Boat.
- 179. Ponte Piovan.
- 180. Garden.
- 181. The Rialto.
- 182. Long Venice.

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- 183. Furnace Nocturne.
- 184. Quiet Canal.
- 185. Salute: Dawn.
- 186. Lagoon: Noon.
- 187. Murano-Glass Furnace.
- 188. Fish-Shop, Venice.
- 190. Little Salute.
- 192. Regent's Quadrant.
- 193. Islands.
- 195. Old Women.
- 196. Alderney Street.
- 197. The Smithey.
- 199. Nocturne-Salute.
- 200. Dordrecht.
- 201. A Corner of the Palais Royal.
- 203. Booth at a Fair.
- 206. The Seamstress.
- 208. Fragment of Piccadilly.
- 209. Old Clothes Shop.
- 213. The Steps.
- 226. Putney: Number Three.
- 256. Passages de l'Opera.

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LITHOGRAPHS.

The Long Gallery, Louvre.

Nocturne.

Etude de Femme. (Colored.)

Yellow House Lannion. (Colored.)

Woman, Standing.

Gaiety, Stage Door.

Victoria Club.

Old Battersea Bridge.

Reading.

and one other without title.

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PORTRAIT OF MY MOTHER

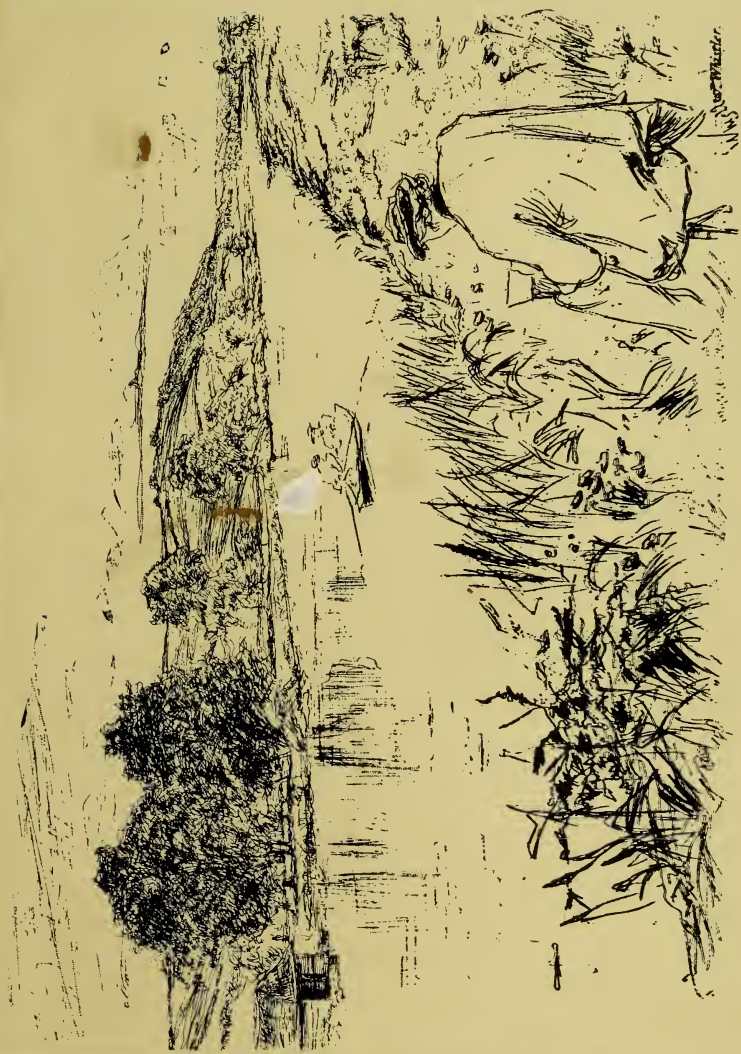


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